

Critical analysis of a research magazine

By Shafqat Tanvir Mirza

December 5, 2010



LEKH....bi-annual magazine of research and criticism; editors Dr. Nasir Rana and Aafia Rana; pp 272; Price Rs300 (pb); Publishers Pakistan Punjabi Fikri Saanjh, 18-N, New Market, Samanabad, Lahore.

The editor is not happy with the official treatment being meted out to Punjabi language and literature. In his view for a very long time the government totally refused any grant to Punjabi. But for last two decades some of the organisations are fortunate that they are receiving paltry grants and that too not on time, but some of them are spending it on publishing poetry and fiction. Research and criticism are totally ignored. There is some space always available for fiction, poetry, travelogue, biographies in the private but regular magazines which are not considered fit for government publicity while some of their contemporary Urdu magazines are favoured by the official advertisement agencies.

What editor wants to say is that Punjabi literary journalism is being criminally ignored by the Punjab as well as the federal government. In editor`s view the only financially viable research magazine is bi-annual Khoj of the Punjabi Department of the Punjab University which was initiated by Dr. Shahbaz Malik, the first head of the department who after retirement is not satisfied with style, research, criticism, editorial policy and the attitude of the present editor Dr Ismatullah Zahid and his assistant Dr Naveed Shahzad.

The most objectionable point is that publication of Khoj is not regular and on this part, Lekh people are justified. The proof is that the latest issue of Khoj for July-December 2009 has been released in November 2010, late by one year. Nasir has also pointed out that because of the easy-going attitude of the concerned editorial board instead of new research articles the old one (parts of the university Ph.D theses) are included. There Nasir is right. The new editors devoted six issues for publishing three doctoral theses

which was not the practice of Shahbaz Malik. All the three were not of high merits. This practice continued in future also by producing parts of M.A. articles and doctoral theses.

There were many drawbacks during the period of Shahbaz Malik also. He was deeply under the impression that he is on the top of research and criticism, therefore he also included articles meant to pay tribute to the then editor.

This is Nasir Rana's critical survey of the 62 issues of the university magazine Khoj. That is a sort of infighting between the present and the past teachers of the Punjabi literature. But the most important aspect of the matter is that both the set of the teachers and editors ignored the much needed internal coherence of different dialects of the Punjabi spoken in different styles throughout the province. This should have been the deliberate effort of the editors but both unfortunately ignored this much-needed work and let the differences between central or eastern, and Lehndi western and Seraiki or the southern be widened.

Once Shahbaz Malik was of the view that the standard version of language is that which is in use in the capital of the area. The other shortcomings was that they were not educated in Punjabi from the beginning, therefore, they could not search out or evolve the literary terminology concerning research and criticism, the job which Najm Hosain Sayed did through his books of critical essays.

The new Punjabi teachers were required to thoroughly read the books of literary criticism in English from which all the Urdu critics borrowed their theme and ideas. Shahbaz and Zahid and their close associates mainly used the terms of Urdu criticism consequently their critical writings are devoid of originality and traditional flavour. Nasir Rana should also note this point. We should not be imitators of Urdu criticism.

Many of the scholars of the other languages and the dialects try to prove that Punjabi is not an old language because the word Punjab was first used in Akbar or Jehangir's period. An Urdu article 'Urdu aur Punjabi kay lisani rawabit' by Shakir Kundan included in Lekh with two other Urdu pieces, quotes Shah Na'ematullah Wali's Persian poetry of 1152 A.D

(Lahore is the city of Punjab and also the area of Derajaat Bannu and Kashmir was taken over.)

In the same century year of 1193 A.D Shahabuddin Ghauri wrote a letter to Hindu Rajas in which he declared his truce with them because he had conquered Sarhand, Punjab and Multan."

Another article is about the poetry written by Punjabi poets during the civil war in former East Pakistan. Writer Dr.

Muhammad Riaz Shahid has done doctorate on Bulleh Shah. One wonders that after 39 years after the tragedy of east Pakistan, Shahid has still not changed his early views and totally forgot the role of Bengali people in the creation of Pakistan where they were in absolute majority but enslaved by the feudal, generals and top bureaucracy of west Pakistan and when they democratically asserted their absolute majority they were taken to guns and swords.

It were Bengalis who accepted their majority turned into minority for the sake of the Muslims of the minority provinces like U.P, Bihar, C.P etc. In UP assembly there were only 34 seats for the Muslim feudal landlords but Benglai and Punjabi Muslims had given their weightage to them and to there were 65 UP Muslim Nawabs in the assembly.

Punjabi writers must open their eyes now and should not bypass the economic, social and cultural deprivation of the provinces other than Punjab which needs to realise cultural and spiritual deprivation which it was facing for more than a century. Punjab was conversion of word Punjnad, the name of the area before the Muslim invasions.